

INTRODUCTION

This is the third message in the series entitled, “Words that Shook the World: Final Words from the Cross.” Today we’re going to consider “Words of Anguish.”

Here are some more interesting final words from famous people. P.T. Barnum was a circus promoter who once said, “There’s a sucker born every minute.” He became wealthy by offering bizarre and mysterious sideshows in addition to the normal circus activities. When he lay dying in 1899 his last words were, “What were the receipts today at Madison Square Gardens?” It really didn’t matter, because he couldn’t take any with him.

Joan Crawford was a famous movie star, whose career spanned forty years, ranging from silent films to color films into the 1960s. In 1977, as she lay dying in New York City, one of her private nurses started praying for her, softly at first, then louder. When Crawford heard her, she spoke her last words before death, “***** it! Don’t you dare ask God to help me.” What an awful way to go out into eternity!

John Sedgwick was a Union General during the Civil War. At a battle near Spotsylvania, Virginia in 1864, he mounted an embankment and was warned by his officers that there was a Confederate sniper shooting toward their position. He ignored the warning and said, “They couldn’t hit an elephant at this distance.” Within seconds a sniper’s bullet smashed into his cheek under his right eye, and he fell dead.

Dwight L. Moody was the Billy Graham of the Nineteenth Century. He was an uneducated, unordained evangelist who shook two continents for Christ. As he dying in 1899, his family gathered around him and heard him speak his last, glorious words, “Is this dying? Why, this is bliss. There is no valley. Earth is receding; Heaven is opening; God is calling; I must go.”

During this series we’ve been studying the last words Jesus spoke from the cross. These weren’t his last words, because unlike any other person, Jesus rose from the dead and spoke many additional words, and He is still speaking today!

Two weeks ago we heard Him say, “Father forgive them, because they don’t know what they’re doing.” Then he spoke words of love to His mother, and words of restoration to John, the beloved disciple. Last week we heard Jesus speak words of promise to a thief. I can’t help compare those words to what happened to Adam in the book of Genesis. In Genesis, when Adam sinned a pure man became a sinner and was expelled from paradise. At the cross, a sinner became a pure man and was promised paradise! Jesus said, “Today you will be with me in paradise!”

Now, let’s return to Skull Hill and hear Jesus speak the next final words from the cross.

Mark 15:33-36. “At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*’—which means, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ When some of those standing near heard this, they said, ‘Listen, he’s calling Elijah.’ One man

ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a stick, and offered it to Jesus to drink. ‘Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down.’”

Now turn to John 19:28-30 to hear the next words Jesus spoke from the cross,

“Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, ‘I am thirsty.’ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus’ lips. When he had received the drink, Jesus said, ‘It is finished.’ With that he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

I call these words of anguish, because these two sayings express the deepest anguish Jesus experienced on the cross. Let’s take a closer look at each of these two expressions of anguish.

1. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” expressed THE ISOLATION OF THE CROSS

The gospel record tells us Jesus hung on the cross for six hours. He was crucified at nine in the morning (the third hour from 6 a.m., sunrise); and He died at 3 p.m. At the sixth hour, high noon, suddenly there was complete and sudden darkness. The text actually says darkness “fell.” One moment the sun was shining, and in the next moment, it was dark, as if someone had turned out the light switch of the sun. As we shall see in a moment, this wasn’t an eclipse or a cloudy day; it was thick, inky blackness you could almost touch like a thick blanket. It was the kind of unexpected darkness that chilled the skin and curdled the blood of the people there.

The taunts and catcalls from the observers came to a sudden stop. As those around the cross realized something eerie was happening, shivers of fear ran down their spines. This darkness continued for three hours and then, out of the darkness, a scream pierced the darkness, “Eloi, Eloi! Lama sabachthani?” Of all the words spoken from the cross these words are certainly the most amazing. There are two important nuggets of truth we can extract from this statement.

(1) Jesus was forsaken so I can be accepted

Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” The word “forsaken” means to be utterly abandoned. Jesus didn’t cry these words simply because He *felt* forsaken, He cried them because He *was* actually forsaken! In the moment in which Jesus became sin on the cross, God abandoned Him. 2 Corinthians 5:21 say, “He who knew no sin became sin for us that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” Jesus never became a sinner, instead He became sin for us.

Ray Pritchard describes this spiritual transaction with these powerful words, “Imagine that somewhere in the universe there is a cesspool containing all the sins that have ever been committed. The cesspool is deep, dark and indescribably foul. All the evil deeds that men and women have ever done are floating there. A river of filth constantly flows into that cesspool, replenishing the vile mixture with all the evil done every day. Now imagine that while Jesus was on the cross, that cesspool is emptied onto him. See the flow of filth as it settles upon him. The

flow never seems to stop. It is vile, toxic, deadly, filled with disease, pain and suffering. When God looked down at his Son, He saw the cesspool of sin emptied on his head. No wonder he turned away from the sight. Who could bear to watch that?" ("The Forsaken Christ," Keep Believing Ministries)

Indeed, God is so holy and pure He cannot even look upon sin. So, for that short time in which the transaction for our salvation was taking place, Jesus was abandoned by God. The Bible says, "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong." (Habakkuk 1:13) "For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. In a surge of anger, I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you,' says the Lord your Redeemer" (Isaiah 54:7-8).

This is the saddest cry ever heard on earth. From the beginning of the beginning of the beginning, God the Father and God the Son had been co-equal and co-existent. They communed together in a relationship which Jesus described as "I and the Father are ONE." But for those few hours in which Jesus became sin for us, that bond was somehow broken. Did you notice Jesus addressed God with the title, "God?" Every other time Jesus spoke to God He called Him, "Abba" which means "Father" or "Daddy." The first word from the Cross was "Father, forgive them." The last word from the cross was "Father, into your hands..." But at this central moment of His suffering, Jesus called God, "Eloi" or simply "God." My two daughters have always called me "Daddy." This cry of Jesus would be like one of my daughters calling me Mr. Dykes.

These words are too deep for us to fully comprehend. It is said that the great Reformer Martin Luther read these words and meditated on them for many hours, not moving to eat, sleep, or drink. He sat silent and still trying to grasp their meaning. After many hours he stood up and held up his hands and said, "God forsaken by God! Who can ever understand that?"

You don't have to understand the theological basis of it in order to experience the benefit of it. You may not understand how electricity works, but you can still use it make your life better! Jesus was God-forsaken so you and I can be accepted by God. I love the words to "Amazing Love" written by Billy James Foote. The lyrics say, "I'm forgiven, because You were forsaken; I'm accepted, You were condemned; I'm alive and well, Your Spirit is within me; Because you died and rose again." Here's the next nugget of truth we learn:

(2) Jesus died in darkness so I can live in His light

As I mentioned earlier, the Bible says at noon darkness FELL on the scene at Skull Hill. That's a creepy feeling. Have you ever been at home at night with all your lights on and suddenly the power goes off? That's what it must have been like that day at the cross. In the movies or passion plays, the darkness is often portrayed as a thunderstorm or maybe an eclipse, but there is reason to believe this was a supernatural phenomenon of darkness in the daytime. You may be wondering if there was unexplained darkness, did other people in other countries notice it? Good question, and the answer is "yes." There are several extra-biblical accounts of a mysterious worldwide darkness during this time. Origen was an early Christian historian. He wrote these words in 210 A.D. "That heathen author (Phlegon, Greek Astronomer, 138 A.D.), in treating of the fourth year of the 202nd Olympiad, which is supposed to be the year in which our Lord was

crucified, tells us, ‘That the greatest eclipse of the sun which was ever known happened then; for the day was so turned into night that the stars in the heavens were seen.’”

But obviously, this wasn’t a solar eclipse. Jesus was crucified during Passover when the moon was full, and it’s impossible for the moon to be positioned between the earth and sun during a full moon phase. Another reason wasn’t an eclipse is because the darkness lasted three hours, and a solar eclipse is over in a matter of minutes.

No, this was a supernatural darkness. I think when God closed His eyes to the cross, the lights went out. This is the same God who spoke into the darkness, “Let there be light” and there was light. He could have simply thought, “Let there be darkness” and there was darkness! When God turned His face from the cross, the world temporarily lost His light. The Bible says, “God is light; in him there is no darkness at all...if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” (1 John 1:5-7) The great songwriter, Isaac Watts wrote about this darkness in one of his hymns, “Well might the sun in darkness hide; and shut his glories in; when Christ the Mighty Maker died; for man, the creature’s sin.” Jesus died alone and in darkness so that we can walk in the light and have fellowship with God. Let’s look at the next word of anguish:

II. “I thirst!” expressed THE AGONY OF THE CROSS

The Bible says Jesus shouted “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” with a loud voice. I think the words, “I thirst” came out as a hoarse whisper. These two words, more than any speak to us of the physical agony of the cross. I’m not going to go into the details of the physical agony of the cross. We live in a time of terrorist attacks, drive-by shootings, and movies filled with gratuitous violence. We’ve become deadened to the violence around us.

But, don’t ever forget that Jesus endured the same kind of human pain on the cross that you or I would feel if we had spikes driven through our hands and feet. One of the greatest Christian theologians of our time, John Stott, wrote: “I could never myself believe in God if it were not for the cross. In the real world of pain how could one worship a God who was immune to it? I turn to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn-pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged into God-forsaken darkness. That is the God for me. He set aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death” (The Cross of Christ). Let’s consider two truths about the agony of the cross:

(1) Jesus precisely fulfilled ancient prophecies on the cross

Did you notice before Jesus said, “I thirst” we read, “So that the Scriptures would be fulfilled.” Sometimes we miss the fact that the details of the crucifixion of Christ were fulfilling prophecies from the Old Testament. Although the Old Testament was written hundreds of years before the crucifixion, these prophecies read as if the writer is standing there watching Jesus die. The cry “I thirst” fulfilled these words, “My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth...they have pierced my hands and feet...they put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.” (Psalm 22:15-16; 69:21)

One of the greatest arguments to support the truth of the Bible is how we can read prophecies written hundreds of years before an event occurred, and then we can read how those predictions came true. For instance, consider ten Old Testament prophecies about the death and burial of Jesus that were precisely fulfilled: (1) Psalm 41:9 says the Messiah would be betrayed by a friend who would eat bread with Him. That was fulfilled when Judas took the piece of bread Jesus offered him, and then betrayed Jesus. (2) Zechariah 11:12 predicted the Messiah would be sold out for 30 pieces of silver. That’s exactly the amount Judas was paid. (3) Isaiah 50:6 predicted His back would be beaten; and He would be spit upon. We know that happened during torture of Christ. (4) Isaiah 53:12 even predicted the Messiah would be crucified with criminals—and Jesus was crucified between two thieves. (5) Psalm 22:16 predicted His hands and feet would be pierced. And this was written hundreds of years before crucifixion even existed! (6) Isaiah 53:12 predicted the Messiah would pray for those crucifying Him. Jesus prayed, “Father forgive them.” (7) Psalm 22:6-8 predicted the Messiah would be mocked and insulted by the bystanders. Those standing by the cross taunted Jesus to come down if He was the Son of God. (8) Psalms 22:18 even predicted the soldiers would cast lots for His clothes! (9) Psalm 69:21 predicted He would be given vinegar to drink—we just read where that happened. (10) Isaiah 53:9 predicted the Messiah would be buried in a rich man’s grave. These are details that couldn’t have happened by chance! What are the odds of these ten things just happening by chance?

Imagine I have ten pennies and wrote the numbers 1 through 10 on them and placed them in my pocket, what would be the odds of me reaching into my pocket and on the first try, pulling out the penny marked #1? Not bad odds, actually, 1:10 chance. But to put that penny back and then on my second try pull out the penny marked #2 has odds of 1:100. The odds of reaching in and pulling out penny #3 on the third try is 1-1000. Get the picture? Let’s move ahead. The odds of pulling out each penny in order, when I get to penny #10 would be 1:10 billion! And Jesus fulfilled DOZENS of Old Testament prophecies, not just these ten!

These predictions about Jesus’ death would be like finding a document from the 1200s that predicted that in 1963 the leader of a nation named America would be killed in a city named Dallas with a shot from a rifle from the sixth floor of a Texas book depository while riding in a limousine. At the time when it was written, there was so such thing as an America, a rifle, or automobiles. A verified prediction like that would shake the world. If you are a decently intelligent person, you can’t ignore the fact that Jesus precisely fulfilled dozens of scriptures written hundreds of years earlier.

(2) Jesus endured the torture of hell so I can enjoy the treasures of heaven!

Some of you might have grown up in a church where the “Apostles Creed” is quoted every Sunday. Some of the ancient Christian creeds, including the Apostles’ Creed, state that in His death Jesus “descended into hell.” Now, the Bible never says He descended into hell. In fact, we saw last week that when Jesus died, He went to paradise with that criminal next to Him!

So, while I don’t believe the Bible teaches Jesus literally descended into hell, I do believe the Bible teaches the Jesus *experienced* hell for us. During those three hours of darkness, I think

Jesus didn't go to hell, but hell came to Him.

Think about it. What is hell? Hell is a place of eternal separation from God. When Jesus died, He experienced temporary separation from God the Father. That's why He yelled, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” If we could lower a microphone in hell, I think we might hear thousands of God-forsaken people crying, “God, God, why have you forsaken me?”

Hell is also a place of darkness. In Matthew 8:12 Jesus said hell is a place of darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Sometimes people joke about hell and imagine it will be a scene of bright lights and a non-stop party, but the Bible says just the opposite. It is a dark place where there is non-stop misery. The only place in the universe where the light of God doesn't shine is in hell. By enduring three hours of darkness on the cross, Jesus was experienced the darkness of hell for us.

Hell is also a place of agony. Do I believe in hell? Absolutely. Jesus spoke about both heaven and hell. Is hell a place of fire and brimstone? I think it's worse than that. I think the Bible uses the metaphor of fire and brimstone because that's the most painful imagery we can handle. In Luke 16 Jesus described a rich man who went to hell. He cried out to Abraham, “Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.” (Luke 16:24)

Eternal separation; eternal darkness; eternal agony—that's what hell is. And Jesus was our substitute. He suffered all the pangs and arrows of hell so we don't have to. The Bible says, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree...by his wounds you have been healed...For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God” (1 Peter 2:24; 3:18). Jesus was the righteous one. I'm the unrighteous one. But He took my place so I can know God. Oh, the love that drew salvation's plan! Oh, the grace that brought it down to man! Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span at Calvary!

CONCLUSION

There is a church in Norway where the figure of a lamb can be seen carved high up on the tower of the church. There's a fascinating story behind that carving. When the church was under construction many years ago, workmen were on the scaffolding working on the uncompleted tower. One of the workmen lost his balance and fell screaming toward the pavement many feet below. His fellow workers climbed down expecting to find him dead, but to their amazement and joy, he was alive and walking with only slight injuries. At the moment of his fall, a flock of sheep was passing underneath the tower. When the workman fell, he landed on top of a lamb. The lamb was crushed to death, but broke the workman's fall and he survived. In memory of his miraculous deliverance, the workman carved a lamb on the tower at the exact height from which he fell.

That's a powerful image, and it applies to us. We are all fallen men and women, and Jesus is the Lamb of God who, as Isaiah says, was “pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:5). Jesus, the Lamb of God, went to the cross carrying the burden of our sin and rebellion, and the load of our sin crushed Him to death. In His death, He broke our fall and

now we can walk away forgiven and delivered by His death on the cross.

Years ago, Elvis recorded a song, "Jesus walked that lonesome valley." The words say, "You've got to walk that lonesome valley; well, you gotta' walk it by yourself; There's no one else can walk it for you; you got to walk it by yourself." Truthfully, Jesus *did* walk that lonesome valley by Himself. As He faced death, He carried our sins and God looked away. But the words of that song are totally wrong. Because Jesus walked that lonesome valley, we *don't* have to walk it alone! Our song is, "Yeah! Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for You, Oh God, are with me!" (Psalm 23:4)

Jesus spoke these final words of anguish so we won't ever have to utter them. He cried, "My God, my God WHY have you forsaken me?" So we never have to be forsaken by God. He cried, "I thirst" for us so we can hear the words of the last invitation found on the last page of our Bible, "Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life." (Revelation 22:17)

He died in darkness so you can live in light. He suffered the torments of hell so you can have a way to paradise. It's impossible to resist that kind of love. Will you trust Him today?

OUTLINE

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"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree...by his wounds you have been healed...For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God" *1 Peter 2:24; 3:18*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes